

Mission San Juan de Capistrano
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

HABS No. TX-321

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Texas - 3

Historic American Buildings Survey
Bartlett Cocke, District Officer
615 Maverick Bldg., San Antonio Texas

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

MISSION SAN JUAN DE CAPISTRANO
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.

Present Owner: Roman Catholic Church - Archdiocese of San Antonio-
Archbishop Drossaerts.

Date of Erection: Founded on its present site March 5, 1731.

Architect: Unknown

Builder: Franciscan Friars and Indian neophytes

Present Condition: The mission is now in ruins. Only a few walls of the quadrangle and the church are now standing. The granary is in better condition than any other of the buildings, but it has been partially rebuilt to allow church services to be held in it. All that is left of the church is the South wall which has three arches above the roof line and was used as belfry. San Juan Capistrano was originally founded as San Jose de los Nazones, July 10, 1716, East of the Angelina River about twenty miles northwest of Nacogdoches, for the Nazoni and Nadaco Indians. It was abandoned in 1719 and reestablished on August 13, 1721. On March 5, 1731 it was established on the river about six miles south of San Antonio on its present site and its name changed to San Juan de Capistrano in honor of Giovanni de Capistrano, an Italian who formed a crusade against the Turks at Belgrade, and who was canonized in 1690.

Number of Stories: The church is two stories, convent, Indian quarters, etc., 1 story.

Materials of Construction: The mission was built of limestone known as "Tufa Stone", the walls being three to four feet thick, the roof of vaulted stone, the floor being flagstone and hard tamped dirt. The Indian quarters, that were built of wood, have long since vanished. The church services are held in the rebuilt granary. The interior finish on walls and ceilings was white plaster.

Other Existing Records: "San Antonio de Bexar, William Corner 1890;
"Texas in the Middle 18th Century, H.E. Bolton 1915;
"Indians and Missions, Frederick C. Chabot 1930;
"Report of Padre Juan Morfi 1778" Deeds and records

in the custody of Dr. Carlos Castanedo, Garcia Library, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

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Additional Data:

A description of San Juan is quoted from "San Antonio de Bexar by William Corner: "The spacious church was constructed in a different manner from the other missions in that it was built into and formed a part of the boundary or rampart wall. It had a tower with three arches which formed the belfry, part of which is still standing. The little convent was composed of four cells, a corridor, two offices, refectory, kitchen and workshop."

An excerpt from Fray Juan Morfi's report of 1778 gives a few additional facts about San Juan Capistrano. "A little more than a league from the mission of San Jose is the mission of San Juan Capistrano, originally established in the land of the Texas (Indians) but moved to this place together with that of Concepcion. The church is neat and in good order though it does not compare with those described as to the buildings (of the other missions). The convent has four cells with a gallery, two offices, a refectory, kitchen and workshop. The pueblo or Indian quarters does not compare either to those of the preceding ones. The mission was founded with Orejones, Sayopines, Pamagues and Piguiques. From the time of the establishment to 1761, there was 847 baptisms and 645 burials, there being 51 families with 203 persons that year. But like the others, it has steadily declined each year."

Credit is given to Harvey P. Smith, A.I.A. for dates and descriptive data. Credit is given Frederick C. Chabot for data on original founding of San Juan Capistrano. Credit is given Dr. Carlos E. Castanedo for the excerpt of Fray Juan Morfi's report.

Author: Jim Cummins

Jim Cummins

APPROVED: Bartlett Cocks

Bartlett Cocks, District Officer

Date June 29, 1937

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FOLLOWS...

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Addendum to:
Mission San Juan De Capistrano
Berg's Mill-Graf Road
Berg's Mill Community
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

HABS No. TX-321

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Originally recorded as:

Mission San Juan De Capistrano
San Antonio
Texas

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ADDENDUM TO:

MISSION SAN JUAN DE CAPISTRANO

HABS No. TX-321

Location: Berg's Mill-Graf Road, Berg's Mill Community,
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.

Present Owner: Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Antonio.

Present Use: Public museum and church.

Significance: First established in 1716, then relocated in 1731 on its present site, the Mission San Juan is one of five extant mission complexes in San Antonio dating from the eighteenth century. These buildings are of great significance to the study of colonial Texas history, providing the observer some concept of that frontier institution which helped to contribute to the development of Texas.

In addition, the buildings at San Juan are important architecturally as physical evidence of building practices and techniques of the Spanish colonial period as employed by the Franciscan Fathers.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The territory comprising the present state of Texas was of little concern to the Spanish authorities until the middle of the seventeenth century, and it was not until 1675 that the first formal missionary activity in Texas occurred, the entrada of Fernando del Bosque and Father Juan Larios, a Franciscan from Santiago de Jalisco, who performed the first verified celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Motivated by reports of French activity in Texas, notably the settlement of St. Louis by La Salle, the Spanish authorities sent several expeditions into the territory with varying degrees of success culminating in 1690 with the founding of the first Texas mission, San Francisco de los Tejas on the Neches River.

The early mission effort was aborted in 1694 and it was not until 1716 that the Spanish officials saw fit to re-establish and encourage expanded missionary effort in the territory. The Domingo Ramon Expedition which began its journey to Texas on February 17, 1716, established four missions in east Texas: San Francisco, Concepcion, Guadalupe and San Jose. The following year Father Margil succeeded in establishing two additional missions farther east--Dolores and San Miguel--as well as the Presidio of Dolores. These missions were under the split authority of the Franciscan friars of the College of Queretara and the College of Zacatecas.

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FOLLOWS...

That authority lasted until 1772, and the Queretaran missions were turned over to the Zacatecans. The reason for the change was the expulsion of the Jesuits, which caused closing of the missions in Mexico that the Queretaran were induced to take up.

Numerous difficulties beset the east Texas missions culminating in the withdrawal of troops from the Delores Presidio in the year 1729, after which the Queretaran requested permission to abandon their three missions and to be permitted to remove to the more convenient location at San Antonio.

Although the written history of the mission is scant, it appears that the development of the San Juan followed the general trend of the other San Antonio missions and that the first structures erected were in the native Indian fashion of upright poles or pallings set in the ground and daubed with mud and covered by a thatched roof. Fifteen years after its refounding the mission was still without a permanent church building. In a brief report written in 1746 it was recorded that the building serving as a church was constructed of "brush and mud with a thatched roof of straw." The building was given some pretension, however, as it had some form of a bell tower complete with bells.

At some point during the decade between 1746 and 1756, the present chapel building was completed. It was described in a report of 1756 as being a simple rectangular building measuring approximately 19 feet wide and 80 feet in length. The walls were reported to be of stone and lime mortar and the roof carried by hewn beams.

Also by 1756 the stone convent had been enlarged. (It was built ca.1744). It was described as having three private rooms, an office, a refectory and a kitchen.

The form of the San Juan Church followed the model of the sixteenth century Mexican monastic church. This late reproduction of a sixteenth century parti caught the eye of the Fray Morfi on his visit in 1777. He recorded that the church, although neat and in good order, differed in appearance from other mission churches.

Morfi also recorded that the convent by that time consisted of "four cells with a gallery, two offices, refectory, kitchen and workshop." The gallery which faced onto the plaza was erected prior to 1762.

The 1762 pueblo or Indian quarters, temporary shelters of brush and mud erected along the east and west walls of the mission plaza, were unchanged by the time of Morfi's visit, for he related that they did not "compare" with those of the other missions which were of masonry construction.

By the time of Morfi's visit the mission population had begun to decline, which was also occurring in other missions in San Antonio. This decline during the latter part of the century was the result of disease, plague, and attacks by the Apaches and the Comanches. San Juan's population in 1756 was 265 and was reduced to 203 by 1762. In 1783 the number reached 99 and six years later to a low of 58.

By that time work on the large mission church, a stone edifice begun in the late 1770s, had to be abandoned, due to the lack of workmen. Only the foundations and parts of the walls were finished.

In 1794, San Juan, which like the other San Antonio missions had been transferred to the authority of the College of Zacatecas, was partially secularized in compliance with the decree of Pedro de Nava, the Commandante General of the Interior Provinces of New Spain.

Although the mission land and property were distributed to the resident Indians, it appears that the Friars continued to serve the mission. From this time on, however, they were under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Linares as all the other Parish priests.

The San Juan mission was virtually abandoned from about 1820 until 1840. At the latter date, the Reverend John M. Odin initiated a revival of the Catholic Institutions of Texas and in the process attempted to utilize the old Mission properties.

San Juan appears to have been in use during the mid-nineteenth century but was again abandoned until 1907-1908 when the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary undertook the reconstruction of the chapel building. The chapel has been in use since and within the last year reconstruction of several of the adjacent houses has been carried out.

PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Corner, William. San Antonio De Bexar, A Guide and History. San Antonio, Texas: Bainbridge and Corner, December 25, 1890.

Parisot, P. F. and Smith, C. J., eds. History of the Catholic Church, in the Diocese of San Antonio, Texas. San Antonio: Carrico and Bowen, 1898.

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Habig, M.A., "San Juan Chapel...", article, San Antonio Express, March 4, 1968.

Heusinger, Edward W. Early Explorations and Mission Establishments in Texas. San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1936.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director, Bexar County
Architecture Survey
January 1969

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The San Antonio project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in the summer of 1968, and was made possible with funds from HABS and two sponsors, the Bexar County Historical Survey Committee and the San Antonio Conservation Society. Under the direction of James Massey, chief of HABS, the project was carried out by Wesley I. Shank (Iowa State University), project supervisor, and by student assistant architects, Charles W. Barrow (University of Texas); Les Beilinson (University of Miami); William H. Edwards (University of Illinois); and Larry D. Hermesen (Iowa State University) at the HABS field office in the former Ursuline Academy buildings, San Antonio. John C. Garner, Jr., director of Bexar County Architecture Survey, did the outside work on the written documentaries. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data in 1983, for preparation of transmittal to the Library of Congress. Dewey G. Mears of Austin, Texas took the documentary photographs of the San Antonio structures.

The 1983 photographs of the mission complex are part of the 1983 San Antonio Missions project, which was sponsored by the Southwest Regional Office, National Park Service. John Lowe of the HABS/HAER Office, Washington, D.C., took the photographs.

APPENDIX
FOLLOWS...

Addendum to
Mision San Juan de Capistrano (San Juan Mission)
Berg's Mill - Graf Road
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

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Washington, DC 20013-7127

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Berg's Mill-Graf Road,
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